UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1994/NGO/17
4 February 1994

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fiftieth session
Item 22 of the provisional agenda

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by the International Federation Terre des Hommes, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[4 February 1994]

Child prostitution

1. The International Federation Terre des Hommes (IFTDH) is greatly concerned about the sexual exploitation of children and about child prostitution which compel humankind to view itself very critically and constitute a violation of all the fundamental rights of the child. This phenomenon is a fast-growing evil that causes irreparable physical and psychological damage to the children who are its victims. Physically, child prostitutes are exposed to all kinds of sexually transmittable diseases, to AIDS, to violence and to serious injuries. Psychologically, they are exposed to many traumatisms. Their personality cannot develop harmoniously, they risk

losing their self-esteem, they are demoralized, they cease to believe in anything, and they are denied the possibility of receiving normal schooling. Consequently, even if their condition improves, their chances of leading a normal life when they reach adulthood are considerably jeopardized.

2. Child prostitution is not confined to any particular geographical area, it occurs, in differing degrees, in all the regions of the world. In Asia, for example, the figures are alarming:

(a) In India, there are reportedly close to 2 million female prostitutes, 20 per cent of whom are alleged to be under 16 years of age, that is to say, nearly 400,000 children. Of the 125,000 prostitutes in Bombay, 40,000 are said to be under 16 years of age;

(b) In Pakistan, 200,000 women, who come primarily from Bangladesh, are alleged to have been sold for purposes of sexual exploitation. At least 20 per cent of these are said to be childrn;

(c) In the Philippines, there are said to be 20,000 child prostitutes in Manila alone. There are allegedly also 1.2 million children under the age of 16 living in the streets, and between 50,000 and 60,000 of them are reported to be sexually abused;

(d) In Sri Lanka, there are reportedly 30,000 child prostitutes, most of whom are boys;

(e) In Taiwan, there are said to be at least 100,000 child prostitutes, three quarters of whom are female;

(f) In Thailand there are reportedly 200,000 child prostitutes between 9 and 16 years of age. One organization has even advanced the figure of 800,000 child prostitutes under 18 years of age;

(g) In Viet Nam, there are allegedly 200,000 prostitutes, of whom 50,000 are in Ho Chi Minh City; 20 per cent of the total number are allegedly children;

(h) The cross-border traffic into Thailand from Myanmar, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cambodia is also growing. Thousands of young women and children from the neighbouring States are thus forced to prostitute themselves in Thailand and must face the spread of the AIDS pandemic. Most of them are members of disadvantaged ethnic minorities.

3. The problem of prostitution also exists on a large scale in Latin America. In Brazil the number of child prostitutes has increased alarmingly over the last 10 years. The number of under-age prostitutes is currently estimated to be higher than that of the adult prostitutes. The phenomenon is no longer confined to large cities such as Rio de Janeiro but also affects the cities on the north-east coast, which is a much more disadvantaged region. It is estimated that there are 500,000 child prostitutes in Brazil. In Recife, for example, 44 per cent of the girls

living in the street earn their livelihood by prostituting themselves and 16 per cent of them are under 11 years of age. Their average life expectancy is only 21 years. In other cities, the percentage of child prostitutes is even higher.

4. The causes of child prostitution in Brazil are many and complex. The principal cause is the poverty of the families. In Rio Grande do Norte there are approximately 250,000 families living in almost total poverty and they represent 48 per cent of the population of this State. In these circumstances prostitution becomes a chance of survival for young girls and is finally regarded by the families as an acceptable solution to their social problems. Other causes of child prostitution in Brazil are the breakup of the family unit and the almost complete impunity with which children are exploited for sexual purposes. Discrimination against the Indians is also a factor that encourages prostitution.

5. In Europe and in the western world, a certain type of behaviour known as "sex tourism" is contributing to the growth of child prostitution on other continents. In Germany, for example, international tourism is growing rapidly and German tourists are travelling increasingly to faraway destinations. A part of this German tourism is sex tourism. The favourite places to which Germans go for sex tourism are Thailand, the Philippines, Kenya and Brazil. New destinations, such as the Dominican Republic, are also beginning to attract such tourists. In Brazil, those who indulge in sex tourism also come from Italy and Argentina.

6. No exact figures can be given for sex tourism. In the case of Thailand, for example, it is estimated that possibly 40 to 60 per cent of the male tourists have sexual contacts with female prostitutes, and that these include children. In the case of Germany, thousands of men allegedly exploit minors abroad for sexual purposes. Some reportedly travel to Asia, Africa or Latin America for that purpose. Others are said to take advantage of the opportunity when it arises.

7. In the face of the dramatic situation created by child prostitution in general, initiatives have been taken at the local, national and international levels by many organizations. One of them, the End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism World Campaign, which was launched in 1991, has achieved great success. The campaign had set action in the areas of politics, law, information and education as its goal. The fact that the campaign achieved positive results shows that a global approach is needed to combat a phenomenon as complex as child prostitution. It shows too that child prostitution is not something which is inevitable and can to some extent be combated.

8. In this fight against child prostitution, original initiatives have come from very many NGOs. Thus, a member of IFTDH has embarked on a programme of cooperation with travel agencies, aimed at making them aware of the damaging effects of child prostitution, and enlisting their participation in the campaign to combat it by all sorts of measures of benefit to their customers. Some travel agencies have agreed to work with the IFTDH member in the fight against sex tourism.

9. The measures for combating child prostitution are therefore nummerous, but their impact is still too weak to stop this phenomenon. IFTDH therefore wishes to recommend that the Commission on Human Rights take the following measures:

(a) Call upon all member States,

(i) To ratify, if necessary, and speedily implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child;

(ii) To give priority attention to the problem of child prostitution;

(iii) To take the necessary measures to put into effect the provisions of the Programme of Action for the Prevention of the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography;

(iv) To draw, if necessary, on the new German legislation which makes it possible to prosecute, in Germany, a national who has exploited a child abroad for sexual purposes;

(v) To conduct public information campaigns on all matters relating to child prostitution;

(vi) To conduct rehabilitation programmes for children who are victims of prostitution and to support the NGOs which organize such programmes;

(vii) To carry out and encourage any economic development programme which respects the human being, in order to eliminate the underlying cause of the acceptance of child prostitution as an indispensable source of income for survival;

(b) Give all necessary support to the Special Rapporteur to consider matters relating to the sale of children by renewing his mandate as long as is necessary and make widely known the procedure under which he can take urgent action in cases of any violation of the rights of the child related to his mandate.